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AUTHOR Johnson, Glenn Ross
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ABSTRACT

Views of academic affairs officers in U.S. state-supported senior colleges and universities concerning curriculum development were surveyed. A random sample of 217 state institutions listed in the 1979-80 "Education Directory for Colleges and Universities" participated. Respondents rated 19 questions on a Likert-type scale. Based on the findings it is concluded that: (1) a conceptual or theoretical framework is necessary to guide curriculum efforts; (2) courses should be experimentally tested prior to full implementation; (3) a needs assessment should be conducted as a major early step in any curriculum effort; (4) a variety of relevant learning experiences should be provided to the students; (5) a greater effort must be made to develop more individualized learning; (6) instructors should learn a variety of teaching techniques; (7) faculty need assistance in how to close the gap between valuing individual differences and doing something with those differences; (8) diagnostic testing should take place early in a course so corrective measures can be employed; (9) time, consultants, inservice programs, and financial resources should be provided to the faculty to benefit the curriculum; and (10) those responsible for the curriculum need to develop systematic plans prior to pursuing their efforts. (SW)

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CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN STATE SUPPORTED SENIOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: THE "STATE-OF-THE-ART" AS VIEWED BY THE ACADEMIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

Glenn Ross Johnson

ED196324

Instructional Research Laboratory
Educational Curriculum & Instruction

Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas 77843

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CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN STATE SUPPORTED SENIOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: THE "STATE-OF-THE-ART" AS VIEWED BY THE ACADEMIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

Glenn Ross Johnson

The purpose of this study was to determine the "State-of-the-Art" in curriculum development in state supported senior colleges and universities of the United States as viewed by the Academic Affairs Officers. The Academic Affairs Officer was defined as follows:

> The administrative officer for the college or university with the responsibility for coordinating the planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating of academic programs; responsible for the general supervision of the instructional program; perceives and comprehends the existing curriculum for the college or university; has the authority and power to initiate and/or approve curriculum development and revision efforts at the college or university.

The Academic Affairs Officer's perception of the curriculum was considered to be as good or better than what might have been gleaned from printed documents.

Those who work with curriculum development and revision in colleges and universities need to look closely at where they have been, where they are going, and where they want to be so they don't end up with a program that goes begging. It seems especially important to determine the present conditions of curriculum development and revision in order to be in a better position to analyze where one may wish to go. This is the rational for conducting a curriculum development survey of the state supported colleges and universities in the United States.

Dr. Glenn Ross Johnson is a Professor and Chairman for Graduate Programs in Educational Curriculum and Instruction; and, he serves as Coordinator for the Higher Education Program in the College of Education, Texas A&M University.

Subjects

Of the 488 state supported colleges and universities listed in the 1979-80 Education Directory for Colleges and Universities published by the Center for Educational Statistics, a random sample of 217 was mailed copies of the instrument in May, 1980; and, 181 replied (83% return).

Procedures

From the existing literature I developed a list of what appeared to be key factors to consider in curriculum development. From the list, I wrote a series of survey items which I discussed informally with college instructors and academic deans to determine the value of each item. I also ran a small pilot study with the instrument. Later, I used the instrument in a national survey of junior/community colleges in the United States (1978); and, I presented those findings at the 1979 AERA Meeting in Boston. Further delineation of the items was made for use in the final survey instrument used for state supported colleges and universities.

The nineteen curriculum related items were worded in question format; and, each question was followed by a set of five descriptions from which the respondent would mark the one expressing best his/her perception of the present condition in the college or university setting; for example:

5. At your college or university, to what extent have departments experimentally tested small units of curriculum or courses prior to full scale adoption?

_____not at all
_____hardly at all
_____a little bit
_____more than a little bit
_____to a great extent.

The above format allowed me to apply a numbering system to the Likert scale responses when I received them; i.e., 1=not at all, 2=hardly at all, 3=a little bit, 4=more than a little bit, 5=to a great extent.

The data were run through the computer using the DISTAT program (Distribution Statistics and Standard Scoring) which identified, on a printout, the variable (item), frequency and percentage for each of the five Likert scale numbers, and the mean for each of the nineteen curriculum related items. I plan, at a later date, to run an analysis of variance to determine if there were significant differences between the responses of Academic Affairs Officers at colleges and at universities.

Findings

Basic data appear in Table I located at the end of this manuscript. Fifty-four percent of the Academic Affairs Officers responding to the survey instrument carried the title of Vice-President for Academic Affairs, nine percent were Academic Deans, three percent marked Dean of Faculties, and the remainder had titles other than those already mentioned.

1. At your college or university, to what extent do you see departments using a conceptual or theoretical framework to guide them in curriculum efforts?

The national mean was 3.53. Fifty-seven percent marked 'more than a little bit' and 'to a great extent' for this item. Most Academic Affairs Officers believed those engaged in curriculum work established some framework to help guide them in the curriculum efforts. Those who considered such a framework 'hardly at all' (13%) or 'not at all' (3%) should take heed to this finding. Developing a framework is not easy, and it can become confusing because of our pluralistic cultures, disagreements over psychological learning theories, different philosophies, and conflicts among the sciences and social sciences. However, I would contend that curriculum leaders will be further ahead in the long run if they take the time to develop a consensus, within a faculty, on a theoretical framework prior to developing units of study.

2. At your college or university, to what extent do you see departments using technological and scientific advancements in teaching students or having students learn?

The Academic Affairs Officers saw the departments responding well to the age

of technology. Sixty-nine percent marked 'to a great extent' or 'more than a little bit'; and, the item had a mean of 3.73. Scientific and technological advancements, and their by-products, must become a part of our curriculum; and, we must attend to them in an organized, articulated, systematic way.

3. At your college or university, to what extent do you see faculty using basic principles of learning in their teaching?

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents marked 'to a great extent' or 'more than a little bit' for this item; and, the mean was 3.80. Knowledge of basic learning processes help us to determine which objectives will be reached easier by which learning models. Knowledge and use of learning theories and learning processes are essential in curriculum work.

4. At your college or university, to what extent have curriculum development decisions (at the departmental level) been based upon a set of aims and/or objectives for the department?

Even though the mean was high for this item (4.06), a disappointing 22% marked 'a little bit' or 'hardly at all'. A lucid and extensive set of aims and/or objectives is essential in deciding what content is important and how to include it within the curriculum. Aims and/or objectives are the focal point of any evaluation plan. Based on the data collected, there is still room for improvement in this area on the national level.

5. At your college or university, to what extent have departments experimentally tested small units of curriculum or courses prior to full scale adoption?

Only forty-one percent marked 'to a great extent' or 'more than a little bit' for this item; and, the mean was 3.30. What a shameful State-of-the-Art we are in when fifty-nine percent of the responses indicate that departments are not pilot testing curriculum units or courses in advance of implementation. Paltry resistance would be encountered if some process was established to test units of study in advance. Some post-secondary institutions establish a special prefix number (e.g., 199) to be used for proposed courses or units, regardless of the

department or college; and, all units or courses are taught at least once or twice as "Special Topics in _____" before a permanent catalogue number is assigned. Such an approach provides time to 'test' the benefits of a proposed course; and, modificationsand adaptations can be made prior to full scale implementation. Other sections of classes could be used as control groups for comparative purposes while testing the proposed course or unit of study.

6. At your college or university, to what extent has a 'needs assessment' been used in curriculum development prior to curriculum or course development or revision?

Fifty-one percent marked 'to a great extent' or 'more than a little bit' for this item, but a large number marked 'a little bit' (36%), 'hardly at all' (12%), and 'not at all' (2%). The mean was 3.50. We need to 'get with it' on needs assessments if we wish to have a viable curriculum to offer students. The needs assessment, or diagnosis, is one of the first phases of curriculum development and/or revision. Data collected by 'needs assessment' techniques help us identify deficiencies in our existing curriculum. It leads us to new areas to explore, and it helps us identify student problems and weaknesses. Research findings, prospective employers, former students, present students,national/state/local government agencies should be sampled for data to assist the faculty in curriculum development and in-service training.

7. At your college or university, to what extent have departments put into writing a clear and comprehensive set of objectives for their departments?

Sixty-three percent of the responses were 'to a great extent' or 'more than a little bit'; and, the mean was 3.64. I'm concerned when so many do not join the above group: 20% marked 'a little bit', 12% marked 'hardly at all', and 6% marked 'not at all'. This item is related to two of the earlier questions (Items 4 & 6). After Curriculum builders analyze data from 'needs assessments', they begin to revise the objectives as a foundation for the curriculum. We should continually return to the set of objectives to select content, choose learning activities and experiences, organize the scope and sequence of the program, and determine

the formative and summative evaluation procedures to use in the program.

8. At your college or university, to what extent have departments used relevant learning experiences to accommodate for differences in individual student ability and motivation?

The mean was 3.38; and, again, I'm concerned. Thirty-six percent marked 'a little bit', eighteen percent marked 'hardly at all', and one percent marked 'not at all' for this item. Although a difficult task, we need to try to accommodate different cognitive abilities of students by providing a variety of learning experiences.

9. At your college or university, to what extent have the departments stressed individualized instruction?

As with Item 8, I am again distressed. The mean was 3.38 with 43% marking ' a little bit', 13% marking 'hardly at all', and 2% marking 'not at all'. For decades we have recognized the fact that differences exist within individuals and among groups of people. We simply haven't become very sophisticated in dealing with the vast differences within classrooms. Most individualized efforts deal only with one small facet of learning---self-pacing (e.g., audio-tutorial programs, programmed textbooks). We have hardly scratched the surface.

10. At your college or university, to what extent do departments use the 'straight lecture' approach in teaching?

A whopping seventy-seven percent marked 'to a great extent' or 'more than a little bit' for the item; and, the mean was 3.98. Lecturing dominates the college setting. Other teaching strategies need to be considered; e.g., simulation, role-playing, student-led discussion, teacher-led discussion, audio-tutorial, case studies, etc. Variety is the spice of life, and students would be better motivated if more variation to the lecture was in use.

11. At your college or university, to what extent have departmental faculty members recognized and/or valued individual differences among students (as opposed to treating or considering all students alike)?

Sixty-percent marked 'to a great extent' or 'more than a little bit' for the item. The mean was 3.61. I hope faculty members are using out-of-class time to foster

individuality and creativity within the students. Large numbers of faculty members apparently recognize and/or value individual differences, but the problem may be that they don't know how to cope with the differences. We know that most professors have had little or no training to teach; therefore, faculty development/in-service training may need to be increased to assist the staff in closing the gap between recognition of differences and actually doing something with those differences.

12. At your college or university, to what extent has the faculty set unrealistic goals for students to accomplish?

The mean was 2.43. Only a few faculty were setting unrealistic goals for the students: 1% marked 'to a great extent' and 7% marked 'more than a little bit' for the item.

13. At your college or university, to what extent has the faculty engaged students in active involvement in the classroom (participating, discussing, contributing, doing) as opposed to passive reception (listening to the professor lecture)?

The picture improved on this item, and the college/university classroom didn't continue to sound so dismal: seventy-six percent marked 'to a great extent' and 'more than a little bit'; the mean was 3.94.

14. At your college or university, to what extent do you believe faculty members establish objectives for their courses and then relate learning experiences to those objectives?

Most faculty appear to relate learning experiences to the objectives established for their courses. The mean was 3.86.

15. At your college or university, to what extent do you believe faculty members establish sets of objectives for their courses and then use those objectives when developing evaluation techniques to measure student progress in their courses?

Thirty-eight percent marked 'a little bit' (30%), 'hardly at all' (7%), or 'not at all' (1%). There is still room for improvement in tying evaluation back to the objectives established for courses.

16. At your college or university, to what extent do you believe faculty members engage students in critical thinking during class time (as opposed to having students engage in direct recall of basic facts)?

This is another area where classrooms could improve. Thirty-three percent marked 'a little bit' and three percent marked 'hardly at all'; the mean was 3.71. Society is constantly changing; moral values, political issues and cultural needs cry for citizens who can reason. We must give the students opportunities to engage in higher cognitive thought processes if they are going to learn to use critical thinking.

17. At your college or university, to what extent do you believe faculty members attempt to diagnose gaps in achievement (weaknesses) of students at the beginning of their courses by administering pre-course tests or by using some other form of assessment?

We definitely need to work on this area; forty-eight percent marked 'a little bit', twenty-nine percent marked 'hardly at all', and two percent marked 'not at all'; the mean was 2.90. Early diagnosis of each class of students is important if weaknesses are to be located early enough to take corrective action.

18. At your college or university, to what extent have departments (or the system) provided the time, consultants, in-service training and financial resources to adequately attempt curriculum development, curriculum revision or course and curriculum evaluation?

This is another area where colleges and universities need to improve. Thirty-six percent marked 'a little bit', eighteen percent marked 'hardly at all' and three percent marked 'not at all'; the mean was 3.24. We can motivate and enhance faculty efforts to improve the program and to develop effective curriculum revisions if we provide the necessary support.

19. At your college or university, to what extent have departments developed a systematic plan prior to undertaking curriculum development or curriculum revision?

With forty-two percent marking ' a little bit', 'hardly at all', and 'not at all' we can improve in this area. The mean was 3.51. Curriculum development and revision call for systematic planning. Many decisions rest upon a systematic plan. Committee memberships, decision boundaries, planned changes, leaders for

groups, consultants, needs assessments, and preliminary studies are only a few topics that must be resolved during a curriculum effort, underscoring the need for a systematic plan of attack.

Concluding Statement

I was impressed with the high response level (83%) from very busy Academic Affairs Officers in state supported colleges and universities of the United States. The respondents were obviously concerned about the topic of curriculum, and the questions must have appeared appropriate for them to take the time to respond. The author is grateful to each of the participants.

There are some weak areas where higher education personnel can put their attention. To summarize:

1. A conceptual or theoretical framework is necessary to guide curriculum efforts.
2. Courses should be experimentally tested (pilot test/field test) prior to full implementation.
3. A 'needs assessment' should be conducted as a major early step in any curriculum effort.
4. A variety of relevant learning experiences should be provided to the students.
5. A greater effort must be made to develop more individualized learning.
6. Instructors should learn a variety of teaching techniques---the lecture is not appropriate for all objectives established for courses of study.
7. Faculty need assistance in how to close the gap between valuing individual differences and actually doing something with those differences.
8. Diagnostic testing should take place early in a course so corrective measures can be employed with those students lacking the basic information to succeed in the course.
9. Time, consultants, in-service programs, and financial resources should be provided to the faculty if curriculum efforts are going to be successful.
10. Those responsible for curriculum need to develop systematic plans prior to pursuing their efforts.

TABLE 1

Distribution of Responses from the National Random Sample

Item Number	Number of Valid Responses		*Likert Scale 5	4	3	2	1	Mean
1.	180	Frequency	26	77	48	24	5	3.53
		Percentage	14	43	27	13	3	
2.	180	Frequency	22	102	42	14	0	3.73
		Percentage	12	57	23	8	0	
3.	176	Frequency	30	92	42	12	0	3.80
		Percentage	17	52	24	7	0	
4.	181	Frequency	62	79	28	12	0	4.06
		Percentage	34	44	15	7	0	
5.	181	Frequency	23	51	74	24	9	3.30
		Percentage	13	28	41	13	5	
6.	179	Frequency	28	62	64	21	4	3.50
		Percentage	16	35	36	12	2	
7.	180	Frequency	43	70	36	21	10	3.64
		Percentage	24	39	20	12	6	
8.	173	Frequency	20	58	63	31	1	3.38
		Percentage	12	34	36	18	1	
9.	178	Frequency	21	54	77	23	3	3.38
		Percentage	12	30	43	13	2	
10.	179	Frequency	45	93	32	9	0	3.98
		Percentage	25	52	18	5	0	
11.	178	Frequency	23	84	50	20	1	3.61
		Percentage	13	47	28	11	1	
12.	178	Frequency	2	12	50	110	4	2.43
		Percentage	1	7	28	62	2	
13.	181	Frequency	36	101	42	2	0	3.94
		Percentage	20	56	23	1	0	
14.	180	Frequency	33	96	44	7	0	3.86
		Percentage	18	53	24	4	0	
15.	181	Frequency	23	90	54	12	2	3.66
		Percentage	13	50	30	7	1	
16.	181	Frequency	19	97	59	6	0	3.71
		Percentage	10	54	33	3	0	
17.	180	Frequency	7	29	87	53	4	2.90
		Percentage	4	16	48	29	2	
18.	180	Frequency	13	63	65	33	6	3.24
		Percentage	7	35	36	18	3	
19.	176	Frequency	19	83	48	21	5	3.51
		Percentage	11	47	27	12	3	

* 5=to a great extent
4=more than a little bit
3=a little bit
2=hardly at all
1=not at all